**THE HISTORY OF ST. ANTHONY'S CHURCH**

By 1911, the Maronite community was in a position to organize a church of their own rite. With the knowledge and approval of the Maronite Patriarch and Bishop Hoban of Scranton, Rev. Paul Rizk, a missionary priest was assigned to the new Maronite congregation.Under the guidance of Father Rizk, meetings were held. An association was formed to raise money and purchase a site for their new church. According to the record in the Deed Book of Luzerne County, the Right Rev. Michael J. Hoban, Bishop of Scranton, purchased from Charles Maurer, prominent local grocer, and his wife, Louisa, a piece of property on the northwest corner of Park Avenue and Dana Street, to be held in trust for the St. Anthony Maronite Catholic Congregation of Wilkes-Barre. The price for the premises and the residence was $5,200. The date of the sale was December 15, 1911. Mr. Joseph Ferris is said to have provided a large loan for the purpose of expediting the purchase. For two years, the families joined together and worked diligently to fulfill their individual pledges to complete the amount of the loan.

Part of the house was renovated to provide a small chapel where the congregation met for Mass and the sacraments. A lay committee was comprised of the following members; Joseph Ferris, John Yazbeck, Joseph Ellis, Salim Badra, Joseph Bechir, and Anthony Shiner. All the parishioners agreed that a new church building was needed.

In the winter of 1919, Rev. Peter Elian was assigned as the new pastor of St. Anthony's. The Catholic Light reported in the anniversary edition that "at present the congregation, which consists of fifty members, is worshipping in a private house, but Father Elian hopes, by means of a bazaar, to begin the erection of a church." Joseph Ferris and John Yazbeck are named as assisting Father Elian in the project. Previously, Ferris, Joseph Yazbeck and Joseph Ellis had gone on tours throughout the United States to collect funds for the St. Anthony's parish. The plans at this time called for the removal of the residence containing the chapel to the rear of the property and the construction of a basement church, which in time would be the foundation of the completed edifice.

In 1913, Fr. Francis Shamoon replaced Fr. Rizk. He remained until 1915.The third resident pastor was Rev. Joseph Kaddah who served the parish from 1915 to 1917. Fr. Shamoon returned as pastor in the 1917 and remained until 1919.

In the winter of 1919, Rev. Peter Elian, a missionary Maronite priest, who for the four previous years served as assistant to Fr. Wakim, St. Joseph's Maronite Church on Washington Street in New York City, was assigned as the new pastor of St. Anthony's. Although Fr. Elian only served from 1919-1920, he is accredited with the building of the first St. Anthony's Church. Father Joseph Kaddah returned for a brief interval in 1920-1921.

From 1922 to 1966, the history of St. Anthony's is largely the achievements of the late beloved pastor, Father John Koury. He came to St. Anthony's on January 1, 1922. He served his parish as a good and faithful servant for the next 44 years. When Father Koury arrived, the original residence served as a chapel had been torn down. The new basement church became the center of all religious functions until the upper part could be constructed. With each year, the population grew so that by 1929, an immediate need was felt to begin construction. On March 26, 1929, a letter was sent to Bishop Thomas J. O'Reilly, requesting permission to draw up plans for the new building. However, the amount available at the time, $24,000, was deemed insufficient. The Bishop suggested that the project be postponed until adequate funds could be raised. In that very year, the Great Depression began. Any plans to build had to be abandoned.

By 1932, the financial situation of the parish had improved sufficiently for the Bishop to give his consent to build. The date of the letter is March 4, 1932. Construction began. Architect John J. Howley, of Scranton, designed the church and John J. Loughney, of Pittston, was the general contractor. On Sunday, October 29, 1933, an elaborate ceremony was held at which time Bishop O'Reilly solemnly blessed the cornerstone in the presence of 1,500 parishioners and friends. All of the pastors and clergy of Wilkes-Barre and vicinity gathered for this gala occasion. The parish committee, represented by Elias Joseph, Anthony J. Shehwen, Joseph Michael, Joseph Karam, Joseph Sadick and Joseph Harry were honored guests. The edifice was valued at $35,000. Father Koury, the host of the affair, had reached a milestone in the history of the parish. Three years later on Sunday, May 10, 1936, the completed structure was solemnly dedicated, and the dream of the original pioneers was finally realized.

Sunday, January 19, 1958, a testimonial banquet was held at Wilkes-Barre's Hotel Sterling. The parishioners of St. Anthony's paid tribute to their beloved pastor, Father Koury, on the 35th anniversary of his pastorate. The first baptism, that of Sahd George administered by Father Paul Rizk in 1911; and the first marriage, that of Mobarak Elias Decker to Jammella Doumit Assee. There was also mention that Mr. Frank Bolus of Scranton and Miss Anna Shehwen of Wilkes-Barre were the first couple to be married in the New Church. The marriage was celebrated by Fr. John Koury himself on June 15, 1936. Charles Bolus and Louise Corey were the witnesses.

An interim appointment, Msgr. Semaan Ferris, was made to administer the parish for six months after Fr. Koury's death.Msgr. Bernard Khachan became the administrator, then pastor from 1966 until 1972. Under the dynamic Msgr. Khachan, remodeling of the interior of the church and some exterior improvements were affected.

The quiet, humble Msgr. John Trad succeeded Msgr. Khachan for a short period following the devastating flood of 1972 in Wilkes-Barre, additionally Msgr Trad served as one of the founders and actual fundraiser, traveled by bus throughout the US, to establish the Maronite Seminary in Washington DC.

In 1974, Reverend Victor Kayrouz, was appointed pastor of St. Anthony's. A sincere, selfeffacing, conscientious priest, Fr. Kayrouz had carried on the commitment of service to his parishioners, then numbering 260 families. Between 1981 and 1988, St. Anthony's was host to a rich variety of pastors; Fr. Anthony Mike, Msgr. Joseph Feghali, Fr. Hares Zogheib, Fr. Richard Saad, Fr. Michael Thomas, Fr. Samuel Najjar, Fr. Louis Baz, Fr. Antoun Saad, Fr. Joseph Naja, and Fr. Moussa Joseph. Father Ignace Sadek served from October 1, 1988 to 1997.